Can WMEB-FM Better Serve Its On-Campus Audience Without Jeopardizing Its Appeal to Off-Campus Listeners

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The programming of any radio station must be dictated at least in part by public "interest, convenience and necessity" as prescribed by the Federal Communications Commission. Good taste is also included, of course, but the serving of the listening audience is the main concern of station management. Those in charge of these institutions of mass communication constantly face the problem of restructuring and refocusing the content of their programs to fit the demands of the populus.

This is most commonly done by audience sampling and surveys aimed at obtaining opinions of the various programs and services offered by the station. While some smaller, under-financed stations or those who simply don't care rely on the "guess" method or do what they please, more competent broadcasters utilize the data obtained from these studies to great lengths in determining what they will broadcast and what they won't. The "Radio Voice of the University of Maine", WMEB-FM, is no exception.

This station, with studio facilities on campus in Orono, operates at low output. Being educational in nature, it does not need to satisfy the public for revenue by means of commercials. It subsists mainly on funds from the University budget, and while it could be argued that voters would refuse to grant these funds if they didn't like what

the station was doing, it is highly unlikely that this would happen.

Again, being educational, WMEB-FM can afford to bypass the mass appeal formats designed by the commercial stations in the Bangor market area and cater to the minority interests of its audience. It can also afford to be broad based -- presenting many different types of programs. Yet, even with as much room to fluctuate as this station possesses, it still must keep a sharp eye on the public reception and reaction to its programming if it is to maintain quality service.

It must also ascertain just who it is programming to and how abundant they are. The vocal few who express their pleasure, or more often discontent with the efforts of the station, do not necessarily reflect what the listening audience is actually thinking. Again, the use of polls and surveys will play an important role.

There is one pitfall, however. In the past, questionnaires have been circulated around campus and the results have been processed and used to influence the format of the station. Persons responding to these surveys would be members of the University community -- students, faculty, administrators and employees. The problem with WMEB-FM as with so many other campus radio stations is that its signal

is carried miles away from the sancity of the school, to people who may have no connection with the University. By the definition of total service, these people have to be considered in the shaping of programming, too. On-campus surveys may not bring out the true perspective of listener appeal. With the concentration of audience analysis resting heavily on the members of the University community, it was time to add to a pool of knowledge by finally putting a finger on the pulse of the off-campus listener. The survey, as created, sent out and evaluated, I think accomplished this.

Reproduced below and on the following page is a copy of the questionnaire that was sent out. Wording and set-up are exactly as they appeared to the respondent.

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WMEB-FM
Off-Campus Audience Survey

In order to better satisfy the needs and interests of our off-campus audience, the following questionnaire has been prepared concerning the programming of WMEB-FM. This is a chance for you, the listener, to both compliment and criticize us on our service to you. Please sign your name in the space provided and indicate your choice in the questions listed below. Your answers will be kept confidential - only the general results of the survey will be used by anyone but me. This year at "MEB" we are trying to reevaluate and broaden our service to both the campus and the community. Your answers will play an integral part in this development. Please fill out this questionnaire and mail it to me in the enclosed envelope. Your compliance with this request will be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Dale B. Lumsden

Your Name:_____

1. How often do you listen to WMEB-FM?
   ____a. 1-2 hrs. per week
   ____b. 2-4 hrs. per week
   ____c. 4-8 hrs per week
   ____d. over 8 hrs. per wk.

2. In order of frequency (1st, 2nd or 3rd), which type of programming do you listen to on WMEB-FM the most?
   ____a. Entertainment(music shows, children's shows, etc.)
   ____b. Public Affairs(news, sports, live coverage of addresses)
   ____c. Informational(National Education Radio Programs and classroom series)

3. From the list below, signify your list, 2nd, 3rd and 4th choices in the field of music.
   ____a. Big Bands
   ____b. Classical
   ____c. Popular
   ____d. Progressive Jazz
   ____e. Dixieland
   ____f. Latin
   ____g. Country and Western
   ____h. Folk
   ____i. Top Forty Rock
   ____j. Underground & Acid Rock

4. In the area of Public Affairs, which of the following do you listen to most frequently?(Give your list, 2nd & 3rd choices)
   ____a. News reports
   ____b. Sports reports
   ____c. Sports Play-by-Play
   ____d. Issue and Interview Shows
   ____e. Live coverage of major addresses
   ____f. Special events coverage

5. Are you interested in issues on the University of Maine Campus?
   ____Yes ____No

6. Do you feel WMEB-FM should devote more time to:
   a. Community Issues? ____Yes ____No
   b. Community Events? ____Yes ____No

7. Are there any areas which you feel WMEB-FM devotes too little time? (please list)

8. Are there any areas which you feel WMEB-FM devotes too much time: (please list)

9. Are you connected with the University in any way?
   ____Yes ____No

10. Comments: (Please give your own general or specific observations and suggestions on the programming of WMEB-FM)

Before explaining the reasons for the inclusion of the various questions, some general procedures should be discussed. First of all, this survey appeared on a single piece of legal-size paper. While some may think this is a trivial matter, people are often less receptive to answering a multi-page analysis -- probably relating it in some way to their income tax form. A clear, concise presentation which doesn't look mind taxing generally has more success in response, and, more importantly, meaningful results. Pollsters will tell you that validity of the results rests heavily on the sample of the audience involved in answering a particular survey. The best method and the one used most prominently is a random choosing of desired respondents within a particular universe (area). This is particularly appropriate in a face-to-face or voice-to-voice (telephone) type of poll. One which is mailed with a return addressed and stamped envelope dictates a different approach.

To insure a meaningful response in number, randomness must be sacrificed. People with some proven interest in the station must be included. Critics will argue that this seriously hampers the results by "stacking" the pool of respondents. However, even though this may be true to a degree, the data collected is still very beneficial. It could be argued in support that lack of response is just as damaging. To find a group which fits the requirement mentioned above was not very difficult and it became apparent

from the start who they must be. Each person with an off-campus address on the mailing list for the Program Guide of WMEB-FM was sent a copy of the survey to answer and return. By applying for the guide, these people at least showed that they knew the station existed and took some interest in the services it performed. This group also probably comprised the nucleus of the off-campus listenership.

Two hundred questionnaires were sent out. Of these, it could be assumed that 194 reached their destinations. Six were returned because of improper addressing. A total of 62 people returned the survey -- answered to some extent. This represented a net response of 32%. With the inclusion of four nice letters from people who chose to write an essay rather than to fill out a form, it could be assumed that 34% of the desired respondents bothered to take a definite interest in what they hear on WMEB-FM. This figure was less than desired, of course, but it does represent a response large enough to yield substantial and valid results. The danger in any survey method of this type is incompleteness, which meant that the less than half returns came as no great surprise.

For expediency's sake, each section of the questionnaire will be considered separately with the general results given at that time. The survey led off with a short explanation of what it was, what purpose it had and what the

results were to be used for. People most always want to know what they are doing and why before they procede. A face-to-face or voice-to-voice confrontation could have answered any problems or questions they might have had about the survey, but I felt the explanation as printed was clear and to the point.

Since these people were on the program guide list, it seemed reasonable to assume that they knew what the station was and where it was, so no explanation of that type was deemed necessary. Aside from getting my name around, I had hoped that putting it in might add a personal touch to this impersonal method of sampling. A couple of letters I received seemed to reflect this, although I will never know for sure.

The line reserved for the respondent's signature created a great debate in my mind when making up the survey. While I knew it was human nature to dislike signing anything, it is common procedure to record the respondent in question in order to reinforce the validity of the poll. Since the identity of the person being questioned is known in the two other types of surveys mentioned, I felt it should also be included in this one. I suppose this section of the survey probably hampered the response to some degree, but at least those polled showed that they were indeed the ones answering the survey. Just as a side note, a few of those who sent

back the questionnaire did not fill in their names, showing both initiative and also lessening the argument of the "dotted line" scaring off some potential respondents.

Because of a desire to limit the survey in both length and complexity, I decided on ten questions which I felt would obtain the necessary information without overtaxing the respondent's mind and, thus, also his interest. The directions for answering each of the questions, as can be seen in the previous sample of the survey, are either clearly expressed or are self-explanatory.

The first question is designed to discover the relative percentage of periodic listenership on WMEB-FM. The four hour groupings attempted to present the four degrees of listenership among those who receive the program guide. These would definitely be higher than a random sample would show, but it does help to demonstrate what the nucleus of the audience looks like. Concerning these four categories, I think I neglected to add a fifth. I assumed, perhaps wrongly, that those receiving the program guide would listen at least one hour per week on the average. Apparently, some do not. Most of these, however, took the liberty of informing me of such, thus helping to further broaden the intended scope of the survey. When interpreting the following percentages, it must be kept in mind that those in the two to four and four to eight hour brackets are what I

would consider solid listeners. They would not have to listen every minute to be placed in this group. This is especially true since WMEB-FM is on only about six hours a day; being FM, does not get the "car" audience; and broadcasts during television network prime time. 22.3% of the respondents said they listened to WMEB-FM one to two hours a week. Listed below are the percentage responses to the other parts of this question.

19.4% listen 2 to 4 hours a week
22.3% listen 4 to 8 hours a week
17.7% listen over 8 hours a week
17.7% claimed they listened less than 1 hour a week.
(The above percentages may not add up exactly to 100% as they are rounded off. They are figured on the results obtained from the 62 persons who returned a completed or partially completed questionnaire.)

Since there are three basic types of programming on WMEB-FM, question number two was designed to show the relative popularity of each of these types. Entertainment and Public Affairs classifications were probably fairly easily understood by the respondent. The use of examples should have cleared up any difficulties. The concept of Informational Programming is more difficult. I felt that the word "instructional" would imply strictly classroom course-type shows and not cover the whole area of this particular programming facet. The inclusion of NER programs in the example, I thought, would give the person questioned a better idea of this particular classification. I reasoned from the

first that Entertainment would probably receive a heavy majority of first choices, with Public Affairs running second and Informational third. This reflects the human desire to be entertained rather than enlightened -- a natural phenomenon. However, I was most interested to find out just how popular Public Affairs programming was and likewise Informational to see if the amount of time devoted to these programs was warranted. The following is a summation of these results.

The first choice of 74% of the respondents who answered the question on their survey chose Entertainment; 20% Public Affairs and 6% Informational. Second choices were: 58% Public Affairs, 10% Entertainment and 14% Informational. A total of 80.5% of the respondents answered this particular question. (It should be noted here that some partially completed surveys did come back, yet the high percentage of response to each question still validates the results.) One thing to realize regarding this question is that there was some fluctuation in first and second choices. In other words, those who had a first choice of Entertainment, did not necessarily pick Public Affairs second, showing some careful selective qualities of the audience in what they listen to.

Question three was designed to determine the scope of entertainment programming on WMFB-FM by finding out what

the off-campus audience liked to hear. The ten choices represented what I thought was the broad spectrum of music which this station could serve sufficiently if need be. It covers all the interests an audience could possibly have and quite specifically, I feel. A total of 52 respondents answered this question to some degree -- or 84% of the total returned questionnaires. For the sake of expediency, the results are set up in the following chart:

Type of Music	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice
Big Bands	5.8%	7.7%	20 %	4 %
Classical	46 %	15.4%	3.8%	7.7%
Popular	11.5%	25 %	13.5%	9.7%
Progressive Jazz	7.7%	4 %	7.7%	13.5%
Dixieland	0%	5.8%	1.9%	11.5%
Latin	0%	0%	0%	5.8%
Country & Western	0%	7.7%	9.7%	7.7%
Folk	9.7%	21 %	27 %	5.8%
Top Forty Rock	5.8%	7.7%	4 %	1.9%
Underground & Acid Rock	7.7%	3.8%	5.8%	3.8%
No Opinion	0%	1.9%	7.7%	25 %

The category of no opinion includes those people who did not express second, third or fourth choices while responding to the survey. While it appears that classical music is substantially more popular among the respondents, note its decline in popularity after the "Buffs" have their say. Notice also the way in which both Folk and Popular -- that nebulous area of up-tempo, middle-of-the-road selections -- keep their strong following right across the board. While, of course, it is imperative that the station serve the obviously large group of classical addicts, a compromise situation on a particular program would dictate either a

format of popular music or folk to insure broad service to the listenership. Big Bands showed up fairly well but Country and Wesrern did not. This appears to go against a common trend among people of this area as seen by broadcasters which dictates a strong diet of "good 'ol C and W." Evidently this is not the case among WMFB-FM's audience. Two prominent secondary interests which showed up were in the areas of Progressive Jazz (sometimes referred to as Modern Jazz) and the newest of the music formats -- Underground and Acid Rock. Both of these are well represented in the station's programming blocks.

Question four was designed to answer a trend in the type of Public Affairs programming most frequently listened to by the respondents. It is hoped that these results would aid in the firming or restructuring of the Public Affairs programming on WMFB-FM. A total of 48 people, or 77.5% of the respondents, answered this question on their survey. The following chart is a summation of these results:

Type of Program	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
News Reports	41.6%	16.7%	8.3%
Sports Reports	0%	2.4%	6.25%
Sports Play-by-Play	6.25%	14.5%	8.3%
Issue and Interview Shows	21 %	21 %	21 %
Live Coverage of Major Addresses	21 %	16.7%	23 %
Special Events Coverage	10.4%	25 %	14.6%
No Opinion	0%	4.2%	14.6%

The above categories represented what I thought were the six major areas of public affairs broadcasting which

this station could adequately cover. The first five are self-explanatory, while the last one is a kind of "catch-all" which would cover any other live programming not otherwise specified by the other five areas. Again, the category of "No Opinion" represented those people who did not express either a second or third choice. From the results it can be shown that News Reports are the most popular program among the audience. Yet, both Issue Shows and Live Coverage of Addresses have an appeal which maintains itself among a great number of listeners. Sports coverage did poorly, but this could be attributed to some degree to the lack of top sporting events in the area -- the interest centered more nationally.

Question four, then, established a trend in public affairs programming types. Questions five and six were designed to set the scope of this format and give it some direction. The first of these two attempted to find out the interest level of on-Campus events to off-campus listeners. A total of 85% of the respondents ansered this question -- 83% said "Yes" and 17% said "No", indicating a heavy interest in the affairs on the University at Orono. In order to lend some perspective and credibility to this question, I ran a cross comparison with question number 9, which asked if these people were connedted with the University in any way.

To explain this comparison further, 97% of all respondents answered question nine. Of these, 76.5% said they were connected with the University in some way, 23.5% said they were not. Unfortunately, this showed a great deal of partisanship among the respondents, but did not invalidate the results to any great degree. Since it could be assumed that members of the University community would be interested in campus issues, the cross-comparison previously mentioned is extremely important. Of those who said they were interested in campus affairs, 77% were connected with the University in some way, 23% were not. Of those who were not interested, 66% were connected with the University and 33% were not. Remembering that this latter group is small, it can be clearly shown that there is a definite interest in the area to what is going on within the confines of the academic walls regardless of the person's connection with it. Those connected with the University who seemed unconcerned with University issues were probably over-exposed rather than uninterested.

A similar method was used to evaluate question six effectively. This query was aimed at finding a real desire for community concern among the audience. Again, the most important figure to watch is the cross-comparison between those not connected with the university and their response to this question. A total of 66% of the respondents answered part one of this question dealing with community

issues. Of this number, 56% said more time should be devoted while 44% said not. 61.3% of the respondents answered the second part of this question concerning community events. Of this group, 39.4% said they were in favor of increased coverage while 60.5% were not. The following chart represets the cross-comparison between the two parts of this question and question nine.

Question	Connected with U. of Maine	Not Connected
6a. Community Issues (Yes)	61 %	39 %
Community Issues (No)	83.5%	16.5%
6b. Community Events (Yes)	73.5%	26.5%
Community Events (No)	69.5%	30.5%

As a result of this comparison, it can be shown that there is a need for some increase in community events coverage, but not a great one. To further demonstrate this, a total of 56.5% of those not connected with the university expressed a desire for increased coverage while 43.5% did not.

Questions seven and eight were designed strictly for informational purposes to find out if there were any areas over or under done by WMEB-FM. Most of the comments hinged on "more of what I like" or "less of what I don't like" rather than objective comments, which I really didn't expect to get anyway.

Question ten was designed to catch any destructive or constructive criticism of total programming. While neither this question nor numbers seven and eight can be "dataized",

the vast majority of the responses were highly complimentary and will be an aid to future reference. On the whole, the respondents expressed satisfaction with the station format and program content.

To conclude, the survey has showed both appreciation and contentment among off-campus listeners with the programming of WMEB-FM. The areas of entertainment seemed to be served quite adequately. A change in the format of "Groovin' ", a daily music show, to a more popular vein seems indicated. Classical buffs should be satisfied by the extensive amount of programming done in this area and Folk is also served, though maybe not as well. The most important parts of the survey, I feel, were those questions concerning the type and scope of Public Affairs broadcasting. Because of its education nature and the expanding awareness of the public, this segment of programming is extremely vital. Maintaining consistently good coverage of campus issues seems strongly indicated. Broadening the base to cover community issues is indicated, though not to a great extreme. The popularity of Issue Shows and Live Coverage of Addresses indicates future work in this area.

I have explained the reasons for making this survey in the first place, and how and why it was put together in this particular manner. It should help to shed some light on the unoften solicited opinions of WMEB-FM's off-campus

audience. I hope it will provide a sufficient base for further research and analysis on the problem of serving the public.